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ABSTRACT

Results of a 1971 New York study concerned with the role and status of teacher aides indicates that, in many instances, paraprofessionals exceed the limits of nonprofessional duties and heavily invade the professional domain. A 1971 Oregon study established that paraprofessionals were more involved in instruction than were teachers, including those without paraprofessional assistance. Even when they had paraprofessional assistance, teachers were more involved in detail and routine tasks than were paraprofessionals. The author speculates that good and poor practice in regard to the paraprofessional role may be presented in specific situation. The author concludes that the teacher's role, as classroom manager, is as overall instructional planner and controller, introductory or redirectory agent for all learning, and supervisor of concomitant and supportive instruction. The role of the paraprofessional is always secondary to the teacher and, although "partnership" is present, it must be centered in supportive instruction. (Author/HLF)

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The Changing Role of the Salaried Classroom Paraprofessional

L. B. Hixon

Classroom paraprofessionals were first brought into the schools to work with and under teachers in relief of duties considered detailed in nature and subservient to actual instruction. When early paraprofessional programs were begun during the 1950's, increased teacher attention to professional functions was anticipated as a major consequence. Non-professional teaching functions would become the concern of the paraprofessionals.

Professional functions were conjectured as limited to those educational skills and specific knowledges obtained through training and experience which distinguish the teacher as different from the layman, while non-professional functions were visualized as secondary to instruction and easily learned.

It was agreed that teachers should exert their major efforts on educational matters wherein their expertise could provide best dividends. Classroom paraprofessionals, often called "teacher aides," and by other less prestigious titles, should handle many of the less important but still necessary adjunct functions of instruction, thereby relieving teachers of these details.

This was the theory in support of original introduction of classroom paraprofessionals. To a modest degree it has become practice in some schools. Recent observations of these paraprofessionals however indicate role deviation from the original conception. This deviation involves con-

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siderable incursion into instructional areas earlier construed as manageable only by professionals.

In 1971, principals, teachers and teacher aides located in fifty-six selected New York State school districts were asked to participate in a study concerned with the role and status of teacher aides.[1] Responses were returned from 133 building principals, 650 teachers and 407 teacher aides. The participants were requested to examine a list of 78 possible teacher aide activities, ranging from detail to highly professional. They were asked to indicate which activities were actually being performed by teacher aides and whether, ideally, they should be considered as appropriate aide functions. Surprisingly, all of the activities were reported as in actual paraprofessional use, varying in percentages from a high of 90.2 to a low of 1.5. In addition a rank order correlation of .88 was found to exist between actual and ideal use.

Within the limits of this study every so-called professional teaching function has, to some degree and at some place or time, been taken over by a paraprofessional. Although affirmed by the study participants that paraprofessionals carry out professional duties when their immediate supervisors are confident of adequate performance, the evidence does indicate that, in many instances, the paraprofessionals exceed the limits of non-professional duties and heavily invade the professional domain.

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1. L. B. Hixon, Role and Status of Teacher Aides in Selected New York State School Districts (SEARCH, Agriculture, Education I, Cornell University Agricultural Experiment Station, New York State College of Agriculture, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, May 1971).

Somewhat similar findings were discovered in a study completed in Oregon.[2] The instructional work of teachers and paraprofessionals in first to fourth grade classrooms of eight Portland schools was explored and heavy incursion of paraprofessional effort into professional concerns was discovered.

Included in this study were 27 teachers with paraprofessionals, 20 teachers without paraprofessional assistance, and 22 paraprofessionals. The teaching services were considered as classwide, small group, and individual instruction, and determined in terms of daily minutes expended. Again there were surprising findings. The paraprofessionals were more involved in instruction than were the teachers, with or without paraprofessional assistance. The total mean instructional service of the paraprofessionals was 127 minutes per school day, while the teachers with whom they worked produced a mean of 109 minutes. Additionally, teachers without paraprofessional assistance had a mean service of 92 minutes per school day. The role reversal was further displayed by analysis of the amount of time committed to details and routine tasks. The paraprofessionals performed such tasks at a mean of 118 minutes; teachers with and without paraprofessional help produced means of 127 and 143 minutes respectively. It is to be noted that even with paraprofessional assistance teachers were still more involved in detail and routine tasks than were paraprofessionals.

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2. Eaton H. Conant, A Cost-Effectiveness Study of Employment of Non-Paraprofessional Teaching Aides in Public Schools (Project No. O.E. 8-0481, Grant No. OEG-0-8-080481-4530 (085), Bureau of Research, Office of Education, United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, March 1971).

The New York and Oregon studies serve to support a conclusion that the present-day role of the instructional paraprofessional has not always developed as expected in the 1950's. Many paraprofessionals now appear to be heavily engaged in professional matters. In addition they have not relieved teachers of so-called non-professional tasks. Why this is so needs to be examined and locally determined in terms of the unique situation within a particular school and classroom. Whether what is going on is good or bad practice, positive or negative in direction and operation, depends on the relationship between teachers and paraprofessionals and the basic reasons for each person's involvement in the learning situation. Paraprofessional incursion into professional matters is not automatically considered as bad practice. Such engagement is defensible when premised on close teacher/paraprofessional planning and operation, consideration for each other's interests, efforts, experience and expertise, and a desire for immediate or eventual instructional improvement. On the other hand, when factors of bad faith, fear of position, over-defense of status, over-zealous protection of prerogatives, rigid and incompatible separation of superior/subordinate relationships, poor understanding of paraprofessional potential, capacity and use, and/or teacher reluctance to perform duties exist, there evidence indicates that the classroom situation is not as it should be.

The author conjectures that good and poor practice in regard to the paraprofessional role may be presented through application of specific suggested situations. Dependent on the individual characteristics of the school administration, teachers, and paraprofessionals, many variations in conditions and practice must occur. The following examples are offered as illustrations of good and poor practice.

Examples of Good Practice

1. The Partnership. The paraprofessional is accepted as a "partner" by the teacher and becomes mutually involved in the totality of the learning scene. Planning and operation of all classroom aspects are developed and handled through close relationship and effort. Division of duties, both professional and non-professional, are established on a daily and long-time basis, and premised to a large degree on the interests and expertise of each party. Over-all, a high level of rapport, respect, and confidence exists between teacher and paraprofessional. The teacher remains as classroom leader and in control, but treats the "partner" in near peer relationship to the point that the paraprofessional is encouraged to participate in any and all classroom activities where competency may be expected or developed.

This practice is perhaps more than conjecture. In the New York study, 56.6 percent of the teachers felt that "the teacher aide is best conceived of as a partner rather than as a subordinate to the teacher." If liberally translated this statement infers that the majority of teachers do look at their paraprofessional assistants as fellow workers rather than as underlings.

2. Partners in Team Teaching. This situation is similar to the first but is extended and amplified to meet a condition where the paraprofessional serves as part of a team teaching unit. The similarity exists when members of the team consider the paraprofessional as a "partner", permit the same near peership as evidenced in the first example, and reflect similar rapport, respect and confidence to the end that the subordinate status is de-emphasized and joint association in planning, development and operation

results. The paraprofessional is permitted to enter into professional matters when appropriate to joint team effort.

Examples of Poor Practice

3. The Status Preserver. The teacher handles all details and routine tasks. Paraprofessional participation in these matters is considered as a threat to classroom authority and status. Since teaching and other professional tasks must be done, the paraprofessional, in large measure, becomes responsible. The teacher forgets her major responsibilities in favor of outward indications of strength, prestige and control. Professional duties are delegated, if not surrendered, to the assistant who may or may not be qualified to handle them. In general, the classroom situation is not a happy one. Joint planning and operation is limited. Division of duties is solely at teacher option, with little regard for paraprofessional impact and advice. A barrier exists between teacher and paraprofessional, with the teacher continually striving for supremacy. It is evident that the teacher does not know how to work correctly with the paraprofessional, and may even fear and resent her presence.

4. The Devotee of Detail. This example differs with Example 3 in the character and practice of the teacher who enjoys, if not worships, details and routines, and is so engrossed and entrenched in such concerns that surrender of them to someone else becomes difficult and painful. Otherwise the same unhappy situation exists.

5. The Inert Teacher. For the teacher who considers teaching as a somewhat onerous duty and easily delegated to a paraprofessional, surrender of many professional responsibilities comes easily. This teacher reposes in control, handles the lighter duties, and assigns the heavier burdens to her assistant. The classroom atmosphere and performance is similar to Example 3 and is chiefly characterized by lack of constructive leadership and careless control.

Some Speculation Concerning Classroom Management

Jackson suggests that the accountability of the teacher as a classroom manager may be divided into two roles, "preactive" and "interactive."

> Behavior relevant to the teaching task includes many things, such as preparing lesson plans, arranging furniture and equipment within the room, marking papers, studying test reports, reading sections of a textbook, and thinking about aberrant behavior of a particular student. Indeed, these activities, most of which occur when the teacher is alone, are so crucial to the teacher's performance during regular teaching sessions that they would seem to deserve the label "preactive" teaching. This designation commands our attention and helps us distinguish this class of behavior from the "interactive" teaching that occur vis-à-vis the student.[3]

Do these roles of "preactive" and "interactive" include the paraprofessional? The answer is affirmative, with the reservation that the teacher retain ultimate leadership and decision. Neither "partnership" nor "near peer relationship" suggest teacher surrender of responsibilities and prerogatives; on the other hand, close relationship and proximity in all forms of classroom management are inferred

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3. Philip W. Jackson, "The Way Teaching is," National Education Journal, Nov 1965, p. 11.

Under "partnership" both teacher and paraprofessional are interested in each role, but in emphasis there is some division of concern. Hence, when these roles are compared, it is probable that the "preactive" is more appropriately assigned to the teacher and the "interactive" to the paraprofessional. In the "preactive" role, paraprofessional input will be expected and welcomed by the teacher; in the "interactive" role, the teacher will participate and exert leadership and surveillance.

The "interactive" instruction, as subdivided in the Oregon study into "classwide", "group" and "individual", may also be considered in terms of teacher and paraprofessional connections. The data in that study indicate high paraprofessional input in "group" and "individual" instruction and only a small percentage of effort in the "classwide". In the Oregon study "classwide" instruction is primarily a teacher concern.

This arrangement seems defensible when paraprofessionals are permitted to enter into teaching. "Classwide" instruction is more teacher than paraprofessional oriented. It requires extensive professional consideration of planning, preparation, subject matter introduction, continuity, assessment, redirection and record keeping. The latter two forms of instruction may better be assigned to the paraprofessional where action depends on limited expertise, understanding, experience in teaching and contact with pupils. In addition, the paraprofessional has opportunities to work with the teacher in overall instructional planning, listens to "classwide" presentations and may be assigned to specific, if not limited, "group" and "individual" objectives. The role of the teacher, as classroom manager is as overall instructional planner and controller, introductory or

or redirectory agent for all learning, and supervisor of concomitant and supportive instruction. The role of the paraprofessional is always secondary to the teacher and, although "partnership" is present, must be centered in supportive instruction.